

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

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AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRI

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, LE, IS, SY, PLO

SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION

REF: STATE 76882 (NOTAL)

1. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH NOT ONLY WITH LEBANESE GOVERNMENT
BUT WITH SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS TO URGE RESTRAINT ON ALL SIDES
IN THE RISKY SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION AND TO ENCOURAGE A
MILITARY STANDSTILL OR TRUCE. A TRUCE SEEMS TO US THE BEST
MEANS OF DEFUSING THE POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATION. WE
HAVE NO REPEAT NO INDICATIONS ISRAELIS ARE CONTEMPLATING
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INTERVENTION IN SUPPORT OF CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON
BUT, IF PALESTINIANS CONTINUE MAKE GAINS IN MILITARY
OPERATIONS AGAINST CHRISTIANS, WE CANNOT DISCOUNT POSSIBILITY
OF SUCH INTERVENTION AT SOME POINT. A KEY FACTOR MAY BE
WHETHER THE MAINLINE PALESTINIANS CAN BE INDUCED TO GO
NO FURTHER. UNLESS YOU SEE PROBLEMS IN DOING SO, WE
THEREFORE WANT YOU TO EXPLORE WITH APPROPRIATE SAUDI

OFFICIALS THEIR VIEWS ON SOUTH LEBANON AND SEEK THEIR ASSISTANCE IN URGING THE PALESTINIANS OVER WHOM THEY EXERCISE SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE TO WORK FOR A TRUCE. IT WOULD ALSO BE HELPFUL IF SAUDIS WOULD WEIGH IN WITH SYRIANS IN THIS RESPECT, SINCE CLEARLY LATTER HAVE ADOPTED MORE PERMISSIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD PALESTINIAN MILITARY

ACTIVITIES. SYRIANS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RESENT SAUDI INTERVENTION WITH THEM AT OUR BEHEST, HOWEVER, AND IN FOLLOWING TALKING POINTS WE HAVE PUT THIS IN TERMS OF SUGGESTING THAT SAUDIS MAY WISH TO COORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS WITH SYRIANS. WE ARE NOT PLANNING TO MAKE SIMILAR APPROACH IN CAIRO OR KUWAIT AT THIS TIME, BUT DO NOT EXCLUDE SUCH ACTION AT LATER MOMENT.

2. YOU SHOULD MAKE FOLLOWING KEY POINTS:

--WE HAVE BEEN CONCERNED WITH SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND HAVE, IN RECENT WEEKS, BEEN CONSULTING REGULARLY WITH LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS.

--WE BELIEVE ULTIMATE SOLUTION TO DILEMMAS POSED BY SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION LIES IN CREATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF LEBANESE SECURITY FORCE, LOYAL TO PRESIDENT SARKIS, TO ASSERT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY AND MAINTAIN PEACE AND SECURITY IN THAT REGION. WE FULLY SUPPORT EFFORTS OF SARKIS IN THIS DIRECTION AND HOPE HIS RECENT APPOINTMENT OF NEW LEBANESE ARMY CHIEF WILL BE FIRST SECRET

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MAJOR STEP TOWARD THIS END. WE RECOGNIZE, HOWEVER, THAT PROCESS WILL TAKE SOME TIME AND MAJOR OBJECTIVE MUST BE TO PREVENT SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON FROM GETTING COMPLETELY OUT OF HAND IN MEANTIME.

--RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON, STEMMING INITIALLY FROM MARONITE EFFORTS TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR POSITION THERE, SUGGEST THAT CONFLICT HAS ENTERED NEW AND MORE RISKY PHASE. WHILE WE DO NOT REPEAT NOT CREDIT PRESS REPORTS THAT SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON HAVE LENT ACTIVE SUPPORT TO PALESTINIAN ATTACKS ON MARONITE POSITIONS, IT IS CLEAR THAT NON-REJECTIONIST MAINLINE PALESTINIANS (I.E., PLO/FATAH) ARE INVOLVED MILITARILY IN GREAT STRENGTH AND THAT THEY ARE GAINING THE UPPER HAND.

--WE ARE CONCERNED THAT ISRAELIS, DESPITE OUR COUNSELS OF RESTRAINT, MIGHT INTERVENE DIRECTLY IF PALESTINIANS CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD. THIS COULD LEAD TO COMPLICATIONS GOING FAR BEYOND IMMEDIATE SOUTH LEBANON SCENE.

--IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IS TO WORK FOR A MILITARY STANDSTILL OR TRUCE. THIS WILL REQUIRE FULL COOPERATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AND THE PALESTINIANS. THIS WOULD EASE THE RISKS OF ESCALATION AND PURCHASE TIME FOR SARKIS TO PRESS FORWARD WITH EFFORTS TO BRING THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS NOT NECESSARILY INTO THE LEBANESE ARMY BUT AT LEAST UNDER HIS AUTHORITY, AND TO DEPLOY A SECURITY

FORCE OF HIS OWN TO SOUTH LEBANON. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS, WITH SYRIA AND ISRAEL, TO URGE THEM TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THE FIGHTING FACTIONS OVER WHICH THEY HAVE INFLUENCE TO AGREE TO A STANDSTILL OR TRUCE.

--WE HOPE SAUDIS WILL GIVE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO EMPLOYING THEIR INFLUENCE WITH PALESTINIANS TO THIS END.

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SAUDIS MAY WISH TO COORDINATE WITH SYRIANS IN THIS RESPECT, GIVEN LATTER'S IMPORTANT ROLE IN LEBANON. A FAILURE TO KEEP THE SITUATION FROM GETTING OUT OF CONTROL COULD IMPERIL THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE -- WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SAUDI STATESMANSHIP -- IN RESTORING CALM TO LEBANON AND SETTING THE STAGE FOR MOVES TOWARD A GENERAL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.
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